

OTHER CITY PARKS OFTEN LOSE MONEY

Municipal Stadiums Without Baseball Are Relatively Small Earners at Best

By IRA HENRY FREEMAN
Do municipal stadiums such as the \$15,000,000 ballpark now projected for Flushing Meadow Park pay their way?

A nation-wide survey by The New York Times would indicate that they do. However, opponents of the project say the findings are based on misleading statistics given by the cities that own the stadiums. So the controversy as to whether the Flushing sports stadium will be a financial success—and whether it is a proper use for public money at all—goes on.

The city proposes to raise the \$15,000,000 by selling thirty-year bonds. It intends to maintain the park and pay off the bonds by annual rentals estimated at \$900,000.

Those with a proprietary interest in privately owned big league ballparks have assailed the plan.

George Weiss, the general manager of the Yankees, the city's only remaining big league club and lessee of the privately owned Yankee Stadium, asserted "every municipal stadium in the country is a white elephant."

But reports from Times correspondents this week indicate that all six of the municipally owned ball parks in the American and National Leagues are operating in the black.

Sample reports received also on twelve municipal stadiums not in big league baseball indicated that six paid their way, while six did not.

Downing Stadium Cited
Proponents of municipal stadiums argued that it was unfair to demand a profit from fields not used for professional sports. For example, Downing Stadium on Randalls Island, built in 1937 by the Works Progress Administration, cost New York \$120,000 to operate last year but took in only \$24,554. However, the 23,000-seat arena is intended chiefly for public school and amateur athletics and is rent-free or nearly rent-free.

Spokesmen for the privately owned parks retort that it is equally unfair to expect them to compete with a tax-free public field. Weiss said last week that the Yankees paid the city \$200,000 in real estate taxes, plus Federal and State income taxes.

Other spokesmen challenged the honesty of the municipalities' accounting.

"Many city-owned parks maintain the property with regular Park Department employees," Weiss said. "Their salaries are not charged to upkeep. Some cities do not separate financing of the field from other city accounts. Others do not charge liquidation of the capital investment to the overhead of the field. A lucrative parking field, which we do not have, is also tax-free."

Bidding for Games Intense
Even so, the Flushing stadium will not pay its way, its critics insist. Weiss said the "bidding for big attractions," such as an Army-Navy football game, among competing city-owned arenas "is so intense that the plant has to be given away practically rent-free."

"It will never get off the ground," says Edgar P. Feeley, the treasurer of the Giants, formerly of New York and now of San Francisco. "The \$900,000 annual rent demanded by the city is fantastic, far more than any paid in the country today."

Proponents of a city-owned facility point to the indirect retail business created by a popular ball club and a modern stadium. A world series in New York has been estimated to bring merchants, hotel owners and service operators at least \$1,000,000 in extra business.

Reports from Times correspondents on municipal stadiums follow:

Big League Stadiums

NATIONAL LEAGUE

SAN FRANCISCO—The 42,500-seat, \$10,700,000 Candlestick Park was dedicated on April 12 as the new home of the Giants. The sponsors are counting on the Giants to draw a total home attendance of 1,250,000 for this and succeeding seasons. They drew 653,903 in 1957, their last season at the Polo Grounds in New York.

The club is to pay rent of \$125,000 a year or 5 per cent of gross receipts, whichever is higher. The city also expects to realize \$225,000 a year from the parking lot. City officials are confident not only that the \$50,000 a year maintenance cost of the park can be met, but also that the capital bonds can be paid off in twenty-five years, leaving the city-owned park debt-free.

LOS ANGELES—The twenty-eight-year-old Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum has averaged \$250,000 a year profit since World War II, according to William Nicholas, the general manager. This year, if the Dodgers (formerly of Ebbets Field, Brooklyn) do well, Nicholas expects a profit of \$750,000.

About half the revenue comes from the 10-per-cent rental paid by the Dodgers. Additional revenue comes from a share of the gate for games played by the

Los Angeles Rams of the National Football League and two university teams. More is expected from games of the Los Angeles Chargers in the American Football League, which is scheduled to begin operations this year.

The Coliseum has 93,000 seats for baseball, 103,000 for football. Half the crowds for 120 events last year went over 40,000 each. The field is jointly owned by the city, county and state.

MILWAUKEE—The gross revenue of Milwaukee Stadium, owned by the county, was \$643,792 for 1959, while operating expenses were \$306,190, leaving a profit of \$337,602. The stadium cost \$7,441,459.

The Braves paid \$186,073 in rent and \$196,167 out of concession revenues last year. The parking lot paid the county \$200,648. The Green Bay Packers of the National Football League paid \$19,960 rent. The rest of the county's income came from advertising and other events.

AMERICAN LEAGUE

BALTIMORE—The \$6,000,000 Memorial Stadium cleared \$297,000 for the city last year. The Baltimore Orioles paid rent of \$119,000; the Colts, football pros, paid \$72,000; parking and concessions paid \$339,000; \$40,000 was taken in by an attached skating rink. Against the total income of \$570,000, expenses were \$273,000. The seating capacity is 50,000 to 60,000, depending on the sport.

KANSAS CITY—The stadium is expected to earn sufficient money to pay upkeep, pay bond interest and make some payment on the principal. The 30,611-seat field is used almost exclusively by the Kansas City Athletics, who have been drawing about 1,000,000 fans a season, 42 per cent of capacity.

A new four-year contract gives the city 5 per cent of paid admissions, 7½ per cent of concession revenue, plus \$24,000 if attendance tops 1,000,000 and other benefits.

CLEVELAND—In the last few years, the city-owned Cleveland Stadium has paid for its upkeep. It is, however, coupled financially with the public auditorium, and the joint operation has lost money for years. The stadium is supported by the Cleveland Indians, who pay a guaranteed rental of \$60,000 a year with an option of 7 per cent of gross receipts after taxes. The

Cleveland Browns, a professional football team, guarantees \$3,600 a game for seven games, with an option of 6 per cent of gross after taxes.

Other Stadiums

The six found profitable in the survey follow:

SAN FRANCISCO—Ray Kimbell, the manager of the City Park Department, said Kezar Stadium usually realized a net profit of \$80,000 or more a year. It was built thirty-five years ago at a cost of only \$164,000. It now seats 59,000 spectators and is used 140 days a year for professional football, track meets and school games.

PASADENA, Calif.—The one Rose Bowl championship football game on New Year's Day, always a sellout for the 102,000-seat oval, is sufficient to pay the year's upkeep. The Junior Rose Bowl game, religious and patriotic mass meetings add some income.

LONG BEACH, Calif.—Operating from April to December, with a capacity of only 12,500, the Long Beach Memorial Stadium showed a net profit of \$11,000 in the last fiscal year. It is used mainly for football.

DALLAS—The 75,000-seat Cotton Bowl, owned by the State Fair of Texas, a nonprofit, civic corporation on city land and under city operation, is used for football.

It is the site of the annual Cotton Bowl game, the home field of Southern Methodist University and will add two professional football tenants this fall—the Dallas Cowboys of the National League and the Dallas Texans of the American League. The voters have authorized a \$9,500,000 bond issue to build a new stadium jointly with Fort Worth, primarily for Continental League baseball use.

BIRMINGHAM, Ala.—The city-owned 41,000-seat, \$1,333,000 Legion Field costs an average of \$50,000 a year to keep up and earns an average of \$60,000. It is used twenty-five days a year for football, the same number for track meets and ten days for miscellaneous events. The voters will decide next Tuesday whether to spend \$625,000 for 11,200 additional seats.

MIAMI—The city, which bought the 9,548-seat Miami Stadium in 1957 for \$850,000, breaks even after paying maintenance, interest and retiring bonds. William McDonald pays the city \$50,000 a year for use of the field by the Miami Mar-

lins of the International Baseball League, major league exhibition games, rodeos and other events.

These are the six stadiums found non-profitable in the survey:

JERSEY CITY—Roosevelt Stadium, built in 1937 at a cost of \$1,500,000 for the former Jersey City Giants of the International League, has never paid its annual upkeep. The baseball team left in 1941. Nowadays the field, which seats 25,000, is used for football and soccer, boxing bouts and special events. It grosses about \$10,000 a year, against annual charges of \$150,000, according to Park Commissioner Bernard J. Berry. The Brooklyn Dodgers paid rent of \$10,000 a year for seven games they played there in 1956 and again in 1957.

COLUMBUS, Ga.—Golden Park, owned by the city since 1949, has not shown a profit in recent years. It was used by the Pittsburgh Pirates for baseball exhibition games last year, and in previous years for professional football. But neither operation drew total attendance above 105,000 a season.

RICHMOND, Va.—(Two fields)—Parker Field owned by the city and used by the Richmond Virginians of the International Baseball League showed a \$7,339 "profit" last year. But the operation includes retiring bonds at 50 per cent of face value. Also, improvements to the field in 1954 had to be partly financed by donations of \$109,000.

Richmond City Stadium, also city-owned, seating 22,758 spectators at football games, made \$3,000 above maintenance last year, but could not pay toward liquidation of bonds.

BUFFALO—The Civic Stadium here has not paid its way, since it has been used only for

occasional football games and stock-car racing. However, it is being improved this year as the new home of the Buffalo Bisons of the International League, who are scheduled to join the Continental League. The stadium also will be home to the Buffalo Bills of the American Football League. The city expects \$80,000 a year income from these two sources.

NEW YORK—Downing Stadium, previously discussed, does not operate profitably. However, it was built with Federal funds entirely and was never intended for commercial use.

Field in Chicago, Too

Soldier Field in Chicago is owned by the public park district. It is used for weekly automobile racing, championship football games, circuses, prize fights and other events. One of the largest stadiums in the country, it seats 77,000 to 101,000. However, it is budgeted with other park activities, including the zoo, and cannot be judged as to profit or loss.

Of the ten privately owned stadiums in the two major leagues, eight claim to be operating in the black. The only alleged losers are in the National League—Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs, and Busch Stadium, the home of the St. Louis Cardinals.

The explanation would seem to be that good teams make their home fields pay, while poor teams do not. But it is not always that simple.

For example, in 1957, the Dodgers were in the black after playing to 1,026,158 spectators, mostly in Ebbets Field, Brooklyn, but including seven games in Roosevelt Field, Jersey City. Yet Walter O'Malley, the Dodger president, moved the team to Los Angeles because Ebbets Field was too small and antiquated. The reason is believed to be that he foresaw a rosy future on the West Coast, none in New York.

Ebbets Field is now being cleared for a 1,317-family, \$22,000,000, middle-income housing project.

The Polo Grounds, vacated by the Giants after the unprofitable 1957 season, is still operated by the club's parent corporation for automobile races, football, soccer and special events. The annual rental to the Coogan Estate, owner of the property, is \$130,000. It is doubtful whether the operation is profitable.

Sponsors of the proposed Continental League expect to rent the 48,000-seat Polo Grounds for their New York team until the Flushing stadium is ready.